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An International Experiment

The *EARL GREY* Memorial Lecture

Delivered Feb. 26, 1921

at the

Armstrong College, Newcastle-on-Tyne

By

The Right Hon. H. A. L. FISHER, M.P.

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EARL GREY MEMORIAL LECTURE

PREFACE

TWELVE years ago it was my good fortune to spend a few days at Ottawa as the guest of the distinguished statesman in whose memory this Lectureship is founded. Lord Grey was an unusual man and he filled a unique place in the affections of the Canadian people. Absolute rectitude, devotion to great public causes, a lofty and imaginative conception of the mission of the British race in the world—these attributes belonged to him in a high degree. But the quality which above all distinguished Lord Grey from other good and high-minded public men was a capacity for enjoyment, amounting to genius, a zest for life, so rich, buoyant and sanguine, that it pervaded everything which he did and infected all with whom he was brought into contact with its glow and radiance. ‘*Laetitia est hominis transitio ad maiorem perfectionem*’ (Joy is man’s passage to a greater perfection). Those who were privileged to know Lord Grey will attach a new meaning to Spinoza’s famous aphorism.

EARL GUY'S MEMOIR

1834-1835

The first part of the book is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The second part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The third part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The fourth part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The fifth part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The sixth part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The seventh part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The eighth part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The ninth part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835. The tenth part is devoted to a description of the life of the Earl of Guy, from his birth in 1834 to his death in 1835.

AN INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENT

THE appearance in the world of a new type of institution is at all times an event of peculiar interest to the historian. More particularly is this the case when the new institution is in point of scale, organization, and purpose, unlike anything which the past has to show, and when it embodies, or seems to embody, aspirations which are not only common to a large part of mankind but are sustained by the weight of a bitter and widely shared experience. Such an institution is the League of Nations, in scale the grandest, in organization the most difficult, in purpose the most exalted of the organs known to our political calendar. What, however, are its chances of life? Do not the ambitious qualities, which we have already ascribed to this institution, in themselves constitute a symptom of frailty? And if the League is in effect doomed to an ephemeral existence, how can it claim the serious interest of the student whose concern is with durable and creative forces?

Let us admit at once that the high hopes in which the covenant of the League was conceived may be frustrated in the event. The clash of international ambitions, the vested intellectual interest in the art and science of war, the combative instincts of man, the passionate sentiment of nationalism, the pressure of the world's population on food supplies, these are forces which singly or in combination may defeat a scheme

for the avoidance of wars however wisely planned or solemnly initiated. Like the Papacy in the Middle Ages, the League may prove itself to be an ineffectual bridle upon the passions and appetites of one of the fiercest animals upon the planet. Yet in spite of all obstacles to success, latent or possible, we can hardly imagine that the League will be allowed to disappear. It may cheat expectations, as human nature cheats expectations. It may undergo great changes. But that it should be repudiated by its members and broken up is a contingency, which, given the temper of the modern world, the dependence of Governments upon public opinion, and the accumulating experience of the legacies of the late war, would be regarded as most improbable by any serious student of public life.

Much will naturally depend upon the wisdom with which the affairs of the League are conducted during the initial and most difficult stages of its existence. The world in its present political complexion is singularly ill-adapted to the smooth and powerful operation of a new engine of this kind. Three states of enormous military strength, actual or potential, stand outside the orbit of the League, one openly hostile, a second smarting under defeat, a third doubtful of the wisdom of involving itself in any form of cosmopolitan machinery. And as long as Russia, Germany, and the United States are not included, full or even adequate effect cannot be given to the main purpose for which the League was founded. With these conditions prevailing neither is a general plan of disarmament possible, nor can an effectual arrest of armaments be confidently predicted. The old inveterate evil, which the League was created to uproot, still remains a political possi-

bility, and once more Europe may split into opposing combinations, armed to the teeth and living in continuous expectancy of war.

There are other difficulties attaching to the present complexion of world politics. If we could all be given a narcotic warranted to exercise its spell for a period of ten years, and at the end of that period could awake, with nerves composed and physique refreshed, to find that during this salubrious hibernation all the outstanding difficulties of Europe and Asia had been settled, the League could have a fair start. In such circumstances it would deal, as it was intended to deal, with a world at peace, with states whose boundaries were established, whose Governments were stable, whose self-interest was in the main coincident with the preservation of society as a whole from the blows of violence, and whose governing class was amenable to those influences of civilized opinion which constitute in the last resort the principal weapon at the disposal of such an agency as the League of Nations. Upon such a situation the League could from the first have acted with acknowledged authority and stabilizing power. But this is not the world by which it is in effect confronted. No benign being has sprinkled the seeds of the poppy among the homes devastated by four years of savage warfare.

The Europe of the Treaties is still in a state of unstable equilibrium, bowed down with economic anxieties, groaning with anger and disappointment, embittered by hunger, plague, and revolution. One filibuster seizes Fiume, another Vilna. On the borders of Russia all is uncertain, within all is chaos. A dragging war proceeds in the East. Poland, Rumania,

Greece tremble for their new frontiers, and whether the remains of the ancient Armenian nation can be saved from destruction is a question easier to ask than to answer. Meanwhile the Allies have still to settle their accounts with Germany, a huge and complicated transaction, taxing the highest energies of statesmanship, and clearly standing outside the ordinary province of the League.

Such being the general aspect of affairs, the best that can be expected of the League for the present, is that it should come into effective existence and equip itself to deal with such limited and preliminary problems as may be susceptible of solution pending the general settlement of Europe and Asia. Gusts of generous impatience were more to be feared than a superfluous dose of prudence. The League could not in its first year afford to make serious blunders. Nor has it made them. On the whole its tale of good solid work exceeds expectation and furnishes a bright omen for the future. It has organized with success a competent, though cosmopolitan, secretariat, which is now established in appropriate quarters at Geneva within easy distance of the Labour Bureau, an institution attached to the League and likely to prove of considerable value, not only as giving to Labour opinion throughout the world a moderating and practical direction, but in the equally important task of levelling up the conditions under which industrial work is done in the different quarters of the globe. Again, the Council of the League has in the first year of its existence initiated a number of important measures, some of them political or economic, others humanitarian, such as the campaign against typhus in Poland or the repatriation of the prisoners

in Siberia. Finally, the Assembly of the League has held its first meeting at Geneva and has demonstrated in the course of a fruitful and encouraging session that the representatives of forty-two states, drawn from every part of the globe, can transact business to good purpose, and, if tact be observed in the selection of topics, with a concordant aim.

It can therefore be said with confidence that the League has made a good start. If it has achieved nothing sensational, it has attempted nothing absurd. Its reputation is already considerable. Important political questions, such as the fate of the Aland Islands, and the boundary between Poland and Lithuania, have been submitted to its decision, and the parties to the dispute have through their representatives been heard by the Council. The small states eagerly desire to be admitted to its membership. The great states continue to exercise an overshadowing influence.

The big question looming in the background and present to the mind of every delegate in Geneva was the admission of Germany. A thousand Leagues would not be so effective to preserve the peace and concord of the world as a full and hearty reconciliation of the French and German peoples, for this is the standing feud round which the attractions and repulsions of the world are naturally grouped and the central source of inflammation in the body politic of Europe. In view of all that has happened in the recent war and afterwards, it would be idle to expect a rapid subsidence of ill-will between peoples so vehemently contrasted by nature and circumstance; but an unforced growth of friendly feeling between these two countries is not an essential prerequisite to the entrance of Germany into the League.

A cool estimate of political risks should be sufficient to bring about the result without any expense of the sentiments or affections. The gravest danger to the existence of France is the prospect that Germany, excluded from the League and driven to look for a counter alliance, might find her rival combination in a renewal of the old political union with Russia which Bismarck found to be the essential condition of German predominance in the West. That danger, so greatly dreaded by the Western Allies in the later stages of the Great War, can only be avoided with certainty by the inclusion of Germany in the League. At Geneva many delegations, notably the Swiss and the Scandinavian, were favourable to the admission of the Germans at the earliest opportunity ; but though the question was touched on incidentally here and there, as by M. Motta, the President of the Swiss Republic, and by Sir Reginald Blankenberg, voicing the mind of General Smuts, it did not come up for substantive debate. Germany had not applied for admission, and it was not for the Assembly of the League to issue an invitation which might be repelled. There was a further objection of great weight, keenly felt by the French and forcibly urged by M. Viviani, their most eloquent delegate, to the admission of Germany at the present moment. The League is based on the idea of the sanctity of treaties ; and before she can claim to partake of a fellowship so inspired Germany must show that she intends to observe her treaty. It is idle to urge that the Treaty of Versailles bears too hardly on the Germans. Until it be revised by the signatories, it stands and should be observed. And the French are still far too doubtful of the loyal intentions of their late enemies in the matter

of the execution of the Arms clauses of the Treaty, and on the whole subject of reparation, to concede that they have as yet duly qualified themselves for membership of the League.

The admission of Russia stands upon a different footing. Nothing would have been more abhorrent to the respectable gathering in the Salle de la Réformation than the intrusion of a delegation of fanatical communists from Moscow, and, for the disciples of Lenin and Trotsky, the whole spirit and machinery of the League is an affront to the spirit of the proletarian revolution. A League of Nations will always be hateful to Bolsheviks, whose purpose it is to undermine nationality, and it is idle to suppose that Bolshevik Russia will ever be drawn into the circle of its influence. We need not, however, suppose that Russia will always remain in the grip of a horde of fanatical doctrinaires. Some day she will shake off her chains, and, returning to the traditions of civilized life, desire readmission into the comity of nations. When this event is likely to happen, no one can tell, but whenever the sun may dawn upon a reconstituted Russia the League will be ready to welcome the prodigal to the fold. Meanwhile it is realized that no step should be taken calculated to impede a general settlement of the Russian question. The delegates at Geneva were urgently pressed to vote for the admission of the three small Baltic States, of the Ukraine, and of Georgia, but, in spite of strong currents of general sympathy, declined to commit themselves and decided to adjourn, or rather to reject these applications. In some cases the arguments for admission were strong, but the overpowering reason on the other side was the desirability of deferring admis-

sion until it could be effected as part of a general settlement with Russia.

In their handling of the problem of the small states which had broken away from Russia in the course of the recent revolution, the delegates at Geneva were undoubtedly influenced by the declared attitude of the American Government. Washington would not recognize the Esthonians and Georgians, and Geneva was not indisposed to listen to Washington. That America would ultimately come into the League was a general belief, as also that she would exact and secure terms of admission suitable to her special needs and position. The importance of getting America into the League was indeed regarded to be so great as to warrant the most drastic changes in the Covenant, even if need be the elimination of Article X, which lays upon the members of the League a responsibility for the defence of the territory of fellow members against external aggression. The question, however, was not then, and is not yet, ripe for close discussion, and the debates of the Assembly were seldom coloured by an allusion to Transatlantic policies. A formal message of sympathy was sent to President Wilson on the opening day, and some enthusiasm was evoked when it was learned that the President of the United States had accepted the offer of the League that he should mediate between Armenia and the Turkish nationalists. A further effort, however, to associate America more closely with the work of the League was frustrated. Under the terms of the Covenant a permanent military Commission is appointed to advise the Council on the question of the reduction of armaments, and an invitation went out to America that she should nominate delegates to this body. It was

hoped that in this way America, without being formally included in the League, might yet be associated with that part of the League's work which was concerned with the reduction of military and naval establishments. The invitation, however, was politely declined. In this most delicate sphere of policy America would not be half-in and half-out, and for the present she is resolved to be wholly out.

It is likely enough that, before many years have passed, the present constitution of the League may be changed in many particulars ; but we may hope that no changes will be carried out with the exclusive object of meeting what is assumed to be the prevailing opinion of America as to the proper organization of the League. Let Council and Assembly introduce such organic amendments as may seem to be needed, but let them be guided by their own sense of what is right and fitting and not by surmises which may in the event prove to be incorrect. When America comes to close quarters with the League she may be trusted to state her terms in no uncertain language ; and it will then devolve upon the League to weigh the American terms in the balance.

Meanwhile the Assembly was wise to defer the consideration of amendments to the Pact. A precipitate revision of the constitution of the League, undertaken in an Assembly summoned under novel conditions, and in any case too numerous and too heavily burdened to undertake with success the delicate operation of revising the instrument to which it owed its being, might have created more difficulties than it set out to solve. Many of the amendments would have been highly controversial ; some were fundamental in character ; and there was strong force in the plea that time was

needed to discover the infirmities of a young constitution and to supply appropriate remedies. Yet this sane and obvious decision was not reached without a little breeze of controversy, premonitory of higher gales in the future, when constitutional revision comes up as a matter for serious and protracted debate.

It is not pretended that the Pact is perfect: the wonder is that the document is as good and weather-proof as it appears to be. Amendments, however, will undoubtedly be necessary—but what amendments? Would it be possible to maintain in its full vigour the provisions of Article X, under which responsibility is assumed for the protection of territories unjustly assailed? On this point, which came up repeatedly when the claims of new states for admission were canvassed, there was much difference of opinion among the delegates at Geneva. Would it again be possible, without delivering a fatal blow at the efficiency of the League, to relax the obligations which are imposed upon all states with respect to the application of the economic weapon? Here the Assembly was confronted with the Scandinavian amendments, which are intended to provide a loophole of escape to a state which may be so unfortunately situated that it cannot co-operate in the collective blockade without serious risks to its own interests. Will it be necessary to give to the Asiatic or American groups within the League some special organization so that they may, as members of the League, but unembarrassed by the intermingling of European activity, work out for themselves some of their special international problems? Then again there is the question of the composition of the Assembly and the Council. Can the number of small states admitted

to the Assembly be allowed to increase much further without a rearrangement of voting power? Can the Council cope with its growing mass of work without enlargement? These and other questions may not yet be ripe for decision, but they arise out of the circumstances and some day will have to be sifted.

One constitutional question of great importance was however settled at the first Assembly of the League. The establishment of a Permanent Court of International Justice is provided for under Article 14 of the Covenant, and the preliminary elaboration of a scheme for such a Court was entrusted by the Council to a powerful committee, comprising among other well-known names that of Mr. Elihu Root, the distinguished American statesman and jurist. Of the Report of that Committee it is only needful here to specify one feature. They recommended that the jurisdiction of the Court should be compulsory upon all the members of the League. No very extended examination is necessary to disclose the far-reaching consequences which would ensue upon the adoption of such a recommendation. An International Court with compulsory jurisdiction could in a very short space of time revolutionize the laws of warfare at sea, which have grown up in the course of the past two centuries out of the needs of the great maritime Powers. Such a prospect, apart from other objections, was sufficient to inspire a spirit of caution into the responsible delegates at Geneva, and the scheme, as it was finally presented to the Assembly, was shorn of its compulsory powers. It must, however, be freely admitted that in this shape the Court was less acceptable to many members of the League than it would have been had the compulsory powers originally

ascribed to it been retained in their full vigour and completeness. Eloquent voices from the small states were heard in favour of the principle of compulsion, for the thought of a tiny state, with half the population of Sheffield, hauling a big Empire before an International Court of Justice was agreeable to the equalitarian sense which pervaded the Assembly at Geneva. It was pointed out, however, that under Article 36 of the Statute constituting the Court, it was open to any state to accept the principle of compulsion for itself, and there was obvious force in the argument that the plant was most likely to flourish in a soil of freedom. Indeed, before the Assembly had dispersed, more than one state had declared its intention of referring all minor international disputes to the arbitrament of the new tribunal.

Had the Assembly done nothing at its first meeting beyond the constitution of the Permanent Court of International Justice, there would have been no reason to censure it for sterility or torpor. The creation of a Standing Tribunal for the settlement of international disputes is likely to prove an important landmark in history; how important, will depend upon the quality of the judges selected to sit upon the bench, and upon the reputation which their judgements may be able to earn for strict and inflexible impartiality. The dangerous animosities of nations often grow up out of an accumulation of minor differences, each of which, if taken in due time to a Court, might be capable of accommodation. It should not therefore be regarded as any detraction from the utility of such an institution if for many years no matters of the very first importance are brought before it. The peace of the world is very

largely determined by the temperature of men's minds, and the spectacle of the submission of international differences, of however trivial a character, to the decision of an impartial bench of judges, will tend to strengthen the dispassionate elements in public opinion, and to disperse the atmosphere of heated prejudice in which small rubs are magnified into great sores, and so become active centres of inflammation.

Travelling along another path to the same end, this Assembly occupied itself, but with less decisive results, with a preliminary consideration of the grave and delicate matter of disarmament. The problem was referred to a Commission, which in turn handed it over to a Sub-Committee for examination and report; and the report of the Sub-Committee, amended in some minor particulars, was finally accepted by the Assembly, with one significant exception. The final resolutions appended to the Report recommended the Council to submit to the consideration of the Governments of the League a proposal that they should undertake to abstain from an increase of naval and military expenditure for a period of two years, 'save in exceptional circumstances notified as such to the Council of the League'. The ideal of the pacifist could hardly have been expressed in terms of greater moderation and reserve. This was no proposal for disarmament, nor yet for a reduction of armaments, but merely for an arrest in the growth of expenditure on armaments for a very limited period. And even this proposal was qualified by an allowance for exceptional circumstances. Moreover, a vote for the resolution was not a vote binding on the Governments of the League, which would be free to consider the proposal

on its merits, but merely an affirmation on the part of the Assembly that a plan of this kind might very properly be submitted by the Council to the Governments of the League. Yet even this attenuated and carefully guarded resolution was not acceptable to all the Delegations, and since every resolution of the Assembly must be passed by a unanimous vote, it was necessary to convert the resolution into a desire or 'vœu' in order to secure its adoption.

The incident illustrates the fact that the moment has not yet come for concerted action on the grand scale. So long as Russia is on the war-path, so long as France is still disquieted as to Germany's loyal intention to observe the disarmament clauses in the Treaty of Versailles, the reduction of military expenditure in that country will be governed not by the ideals of the League but by the stern pressure of domestic finance. We have no right to complain of this. Were Great Britain placed in the position of France we should probably act in the same way. The public opinion of a country recently invaded and ravaged by a powerful foe must be treated with all the respect due to an invalid of brilliant physique, whose nervous strength has been temporarily deranged by a cruel accident.

It may, however, be asked whether the machinery of the League is necessary at all in order to secure the adoption of some international plan for the reduction of armaments to reasonable proportions. Modern war is an affair for the great nations. A small country like Belgium or Finland may keep an army and a few ships; but it will never embark upon a war unless it be involved in a great embroilment resulting from the ambition of its powerful neighbours. The only small countries

which will fight for fighting's sake are the half civilized states of the Balkans. But a Balkan war, if strictly localized, strikes no great blow at the general structure of civilization, and only acquires an importance for the world if the greater Powers are drawn in.

If, then, the huge calamity of modern war, with its unspeakable sacrifices in men and money, is to be avoided in the future, it is sufficient that the first-class military states should come to an agreement among themselves to limit armaments. There is no need to call upon the small states to co-operate. A disarmament treaty signed by Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, the United States, would be quite sufficient to relieve the world from the hideous incubus under which its populations have laboured for the last generation. Of such a project a naval agreement between Great Britain, the United States, and Japan, would be an instalment of incalculable value ; and this not only, or indeed chiefly, by reason of the financial relief which it would afford at a time of special stringency, but still more as raising a timely and effectual barrier against the growth of possible international animosities in the future. The existence, however, of a League of Nations is no necessary preliminary to the formation of such agreements as these. They could be made to-morrow without the intervention of any of the machinery provided by the Covenant. Indeed, it is possible that many of the most important steps in the direction of universal peace will be taken not by the joint action of the members of the League acting through the organs of the League, but by individual states or groups of states acting independently of it. However true it may be that public opinion in the

small states of Europe is generally to be counted on as being on the side of peace, and however deeply the inconveniences of war may have sunk into the minds of the neutral states all over the world, the voice of the small states is not decisive in this matter. The wars of the future, if wars there be, will be made by the great states or by combinations of the great states, and it is upon their attitude towards disarmament that the future peace of the world depends.

✓ There are, however, grounds for thinking that states which might hesitate to enter into negotiations for disarmament with one another, might be ready to accept a general plan offered by the Council of the League. To negotiate a treaty of disarmament with another state, which from any point of view can be regarded as a rival, is a delicate undertaking from which the prudent statesman may shrink unless he is reasonably secure of success, for no sooner does one Government approach another with this end in view, than all sorts of misconstructions are placed upon the overture. It is a note of timidity. It is a Machiavellian device for exhibiting the other party in an odious light. It is insincere. The bargain is unequal. And ingenious minds begin to work upon all the possible points of rivalry and antagonism which may make such a treaty undesirable. ✓ But if the overture comes not from a single nation, but from the guiding organ of a League, to which all nations have subscribed, there is no such disagreeable confrontation, and the chances of a prosperous issue are correspondingly increased.

Besides, the extent to which disarmament can be pushed will and must depend upon the success with which measures can be devised to corroborate the

mutual confidence of states throughout the world. And it is here that an international institution both permanent and comprehensive is likely to present advantages over and above those to be secured from particular arrangements entered into by groups of important states. The Covenant of the League holds out the prospect that armaments will be reduced to the minimum necessary to enable a state to provide for its defence and to discharge its international obligations ; but that minimum is not a fixed point. As misunderstandings are removed and as confidence increases, nations will find that their military requirements will become less onerous. They will be able to reduce and again to reduce, if they can be assured that they are acting upon a plan which is universal and simultaneous and does not expose them to special disadvantage. Such a plan is proposed under the Covenant of the League and there is no reason to think that it is Utopian.

Opinions, however, may reasonably differ as to the method by which the goal of disarmament may be most easily reached. The authors of the Covenant contemplate a free exchange of military information, and a decennial review by a competent military commission of the military requirements and establishments of each member of the League.

The first steps to give effect to this plan have already been taken. A permanent military Commission has been appointed and installed in the Palais des Nations at Geneva. A table of inquiries has been prepared for circulation among the Powers, and in due course it may be expected that the Council of the League will receive reports from its members as to the scope of the military

and naval establishments which they consider to be appropriate to their special needs and as to the reductions which they are prepared to undertake. It may, however, be seriously doubted whether the elaborate machinery suggested in the Covenant of the League is really necessary.

Would it not be a simpler and more practical course to start with the general assumption that each state is already equipped with the armaments which it requires, and to invite each and all to agree to a plan for a simultaneous and proportionate reduction not in their military and naval establishments but in their military and naval budgets ?

The great advantage of dealing with expenditure rather than with armaments is that while a good deal of secrecy is often practised with regard to armaments the expenditure of a country is public property. Some evasions, indeed, may be practised even in the sphere of finance, but these are a negligible quantity when weighed against the huge totals of a modern military budget in a first-class state. The sum to be taken as the datum line would no doubt have to be fixed with care. States which had economized on armaments might justly complain if they were put upon the same level as states which had been lavish in military and naval expenditure. Again modern naval armaments are peculiarly expensive, and seeing that the scale of expenditure is, in this sphere of activity, specially affected by the speed at which scientific inventions and improvements are made, a maritime state, mainly dependent on a navy for its defence, may shrink from accepting a scheme of pecuniary retrenchment on a basis strictly proportionate to that imposed on a land power.

All this serves to show that even a scheme of proportionate reduction in budgets is not without difficulties and may, especially if the percentage be fixed at a high figure, require to be accompanied by a number of carefully contrived equalizing qualifications.

It has been said that the first Assembly of the League contained too many diplomatists, and that it would be difficult to derive from its proceedings any clear image of the real state of public opinion in the forty-two states whose delegates sat in the Salle de la Réformation at Geneva. There is some substance in this criticism. The delegates were selected by the Governments, and each Government presumably sent to Geneva men of experience who were in possession of its views and might be trusted to represent them with fidelity. It was therefore natural for the distant nations to be represented in part, if not entirely, by ambassadors or ministers attached to European Governments. Many of the subjects which came up for discussion related to the affairs of Europe, and could best be handled by men whose official position had already given them an insight into the politics of the Continent. Thus China was represented by its ambassador at the Court of St. James, Brazil by its ambassador in Paris, and Japan by its representatives in Paris and London. The voice of 'open diplomacy', the expression of democratic opinion hot from the minds of the toiling masses, the untrammelled freedom of an International Labour Conference—these attributes were absent from the Assembly of the League, and their absence has been regretted in certain quarters. The Assembly was a body of serious men, weighted with a sense of responsibility and determined to achieve practical results. There

were, indeed, many delegates, and those not the least distinguished, who permitted themselves a considerable range of liberty, either because they had received no specific instructions from their Governments, or because the problems under consideration did not specially affect the states which they represented, or because they held the view that it was essential to the dignity and usefulness of the Assembly that its delegates should be entirely free to follow whithersoever the argument might lead. It would present an altogether false view of the Assembly to depict it as a body of marionettes moving at the bidding of distant Governments. Votes could be secured by eloquent oratory, for the Assembly was above all things romantic and sentimental, and to many of the delegates from outside Europe, large appeals to the heart, expressed in moving language, were more effective than closely knit argument. Yet, when all these deductions have been made, it remains true that the principal decisions of the Assembly were in strict accordance with the views of the prevailing Governments. The Assembly was not an unauthoritative debating society of philanthropic idealists, gathered together for the purpose of improving the public conscience of Europe by the excellence of their principles. Neither was it a body of pledge-bound diplomats acting under binding instructions from their Governments, and fettered at every stage by limitations which they were precluded from ignoring. It was neither a diplomatic Congress, nor yet was it a Parliament, but a mixture of both, combining in unusual proportions the strict sense of responsibility belonging to the diplomatic profession, the susceptibility to oratory of a popular assembly, and the freedom of thought and

expression which we expect to find in those who travel in the high latitudes of political idealism.

Two circumstances contributed to give to the proceedings of the Assembly a peculiar colour which differentiated it from ordinary Parliamentary gatherings. The first of these was the necessity for translation from English into French and from French into English. Now the interposition of a translation, however skilfully it may be executed, inevitably blunts the edge of controversy. Hot thought does not follow on hot thought. A slab of cooling material is interposed. It is difficult if not impossible to tune an assembly up to a high pitch of excitement if, no matter how fiery and provocative the declamation, the impassive neutrality of the translator is invariably intruded between provocation and reply. Translation therefore tends to keep down the temperature, and in an Assembly dedicated to the promotion of international peace, this adventitious circumstance, so inconvenient, so tedious, so wasteful of time, may not be without its advantages.

The second circumstance is the rule of unanimity. *Prima facie* no arrangement seems more absurd than that a single state, however small, should be able to defeat the declared wish of the majority, however large. It is easy to imagine scandals, recalling the days of *liberum veto* in Poland—a state putting a price upon its vote and blackmailing its fellow-members for the vilest and most material of motives. But the reason at the back of the rule of unanimity is obvious enough. It is a concession to the strength of national feeling. So long as unanimity is required for any resolution of the Assembly, no state, however small, need fear that

its will may be overborne by the legislative organ of the League. The rule of unanimity has in other words been devised to secure confidence in the League, to reassure timorous spirits against the phantom of a Super-state, and to indicate in a decisive way that a state entering the League loses no valuable part of its liberty and independence. Whether the rule will or can be maintained in all its rigour is a matter for the future. Meanwhile it is opportune to notice one of its consequences. A great deal is made in the Press of the importance of publicity. We are told that the era of secret diplomacy has closed and that the League stands for fair and open dealing between nation and nation. The rule of unanimity, however, is not in itself favourable to publicity. If it be really important to get something done and that something can only be done if forty-two states agree unanimously to do it, a good deal of private and informal conference will probably be necessary, either before or pending the public debate, in order to discover the formula of conciliation which all parties will be willing to accept. There is no great harm in this so long as good and honourable men sit in the Assembly. Indeed it is an indispensable condition of effective workmanship.

Will it, however, be possible to maintain a high level of personal distinction in this cosmopolitan legislature? Last November the Assembly was a novelty, and contained a fair sprinkling of famous names. France sent her most dazzling orator, her most experienced veteran in public affairs, and one of her most accomplished Academicians. Mr. Balfour brought to the debates at Geneva the immense authority of a brilliant intellect and of a long and honourable political record in the service

of a great Empire. Poland was represented by Mr. Paderewski, the most musical of orators, the most oratorical of musicians, Belgium by M. Hymans, who filled with great acceptance the office of President of the Assembly, Sweden by the blunt honesty of its ex-Socialist Premier, M. Branting. In M. Motta, the President of the Swiss Confederation, an Italian by race, a Catholic by religion, a liberal in political outlook, the aspirations and ideals of the smaller states of Europe found an eloquent but not too eloquent exponent, Norway was represented by the giant stature and devouring energy of its great Arctic explorer Nansen, South Africa by the lofty enthusiasm of Lord Robert Cecil, chief among British apostles of the League, Canada by two of its ablest statemen, Sir George Foster and Mr. Rowell. Next year the Assembly will excite less curiosity and perhaps less interest, and since we are now promised an Assembly every Autumn it is permitted to doubt whether the larger states will find it possible as a rule to be represented by members of their governments. There is no harm here—indeed no one of the three French delegates in the First Assembly was a member of the ruling Cabinet—so long as the delegates are men of personal eminence, who can speak with authority for the governments which they represent; but personal eminence is essential. If the members of the League send mediocrities to the Assembly, no amount of excellent practical work will keep the institution in the eye of Europe or redeem it from the charge of futility. Public opinion is so constituted that it will hold the Assembly of the League in no higher measure of regard than that which is plainly accorded to it by the Governments of the world. If the

Cabinets and Parliaments think the Assembly important, the Press will think it important also, and the voice of the Press will find an echo in the mind of the public. If on the other hand it is clear that the proceedings of this body are regarded as so much otiose and irrelevant business by the men who guide the destinies of states, the ordinary man and woman will come to entertain the same disparaging opinion of its virtues and possibilities. And as the clearest manifestation of the esteem in which the Assembly is held by the Governments of the League will be afforded by the quality of the men who are deputed to compose it, nothing would more certainly be calculated to abase the general interest taken in the League than a long succession of insipid and mediocre Assemblies.

It is also a matter for consideration whether a system under which Luxemburg and Panama enjoy equal voting strength with Great Britain and France is likely to endure very long without modification. Equality is all very well so long as it be accompanied by an equal sense of responsibility—but it is just this equal sense of responsibility which it is difficult if not impossible to ensure under the present constitution of the Assembly. Let us assume that the question to be decided is whether or no Georgia should be admitted to the League. However seriously minded Uruguay may be, she can hardly be expected to approach the consideration of the problem as seriously as Great Britain, for Uruguay is well aware that the admission of Georgia cannot conceivably involve her in practical responsibilities, whereas Great Britain knows that a vote for the admission of Georgia might in certain contingencies very well entail a British naval expedition to Batum. Fortunately theoretical

anomalies do not always entail the grave practical inconveniences to which in strict logic they should give rise. Good sense and good feeling can triumph over the most unlikely constitutional contrivances. The state, whose concern in the solution of a problem is remote and attenuated, may be sufficiently prudent and tactful to take its direction from delegates who are more nearly and directly concerned. And in effect such a course was very generally pursued. Still the large number of small states in the Assembly, and the prospect that it may be further swollen in the future, does create a problem, seeing that the balance of voting power is made to vary so widely from the balance of population or fighting strength. Suggestions have been thrown out that certain small powers should be grouped together, or that additional votes should be given to the greater states, but it is probably too late to effect such alterations now, even if the temper of the Assembly were to permit them, and we must trust to the operation of sound political judgement to supply the unwritten conventions needful to redress the open anomalies of the constitution.

It is not the function of the Assembly to discuss the domestic affairs of its members. A President who knew his business would at once rule out all attempt to ventilate the grievances of the Catalans under the Spanish, of the Irish under the British, or of the Algerian Arabs under French rule. Yet even when full allowance has been made for such exclusions the field of debatable matter will be ample. There are international questions, quite proper for discussion in the Assembly and not unlikely to be discussed at future meetings, which would at once arouse the warmest passions in the

parties immediately concerned. Should China raise the question of Shantung, or Bolivia the revision of her treaty with Chili (alleged to have been forced), and should the general sentiment of the Assembly be clearly evidenced upon one or other side of the controversy, the least favoured nation would undoubtedly be very angry with the League and might go so far as to withdraw its delegation. Incidents of this kind are to be expected if the Assembly is in any real sense to act as an organ of international opinion upon living issues. Nothing venture nothing win. If the Assembly continues to select the safe and to avoid the hazardous topics, if there is no frank and open collision upon the questions which really move the interests and passions of men, it will not fulfil one of its principal functions, which is to provide a medium within which a sound opinion animated by the will to peace may form itself upon those matters which are most likely to give rise to international trouble. Last November M. Tittoni was blamed in some quarters for opening out his mind as to the desirability of a scheme for rationing the raw materials of the world. 'What? The Italians propose to ration out Canadian wheat and British coal!' Mr. Rowell, an upright statesman and a forcible speaker, made it clear that Canada would have none of such a project, and indeed it is difficult to see how the Italian argument can sustain close economic scrutiny. For to which class of material should we most properly assign the epithet 'raw', to the sunshine and waterfalls of Italy or to the coal of England, eighty per cent. of whose cost goes in the wages of labour? Yet here is a theme upon which public opinion in Italy is deeply interested, and for reasons which will readily be appre-

ciated by all who are acquainted with the present intolerable hardships of an Italian winter. An open discussion of the large issues involved, conducted by competent men in such a way as to bring out the real grievance on the one side and the objections to the proposed remedy on the other, could hardly fail to have a wholesome influence on public opinion both in Italy and in the world at large. One of the dangers of the present time is the difficulty of removing the hard granite blocks of national prejudice which impede the free circulation of opinion upon international topics. A little fresh air does no one any harm, so long as the breeze does not freshen into a hurricane, and the debates of Assembly may serve to convey currents of valuable criticism into quarters where the atmosphere has been rendered stale and lifeless by the closed shutters of national prejudice.

One of the advantages most frequently predicted of the League is that it marks the end of secret diplomacy. The members of the League bind themselves to register their Treaties which are thus made public, and as the conclusions of the Council and debates of the Assembly are given to the world, the essential features and conclusions of such international business as is conducted by the League will inevitably unroll themselves before the eyes of the public.

It is necessary, however, to note one qualification. The Assembly will meet for a month or so every autumn, the Council will meet in general every two months in the year. In the intervals the current business of the League is conducted by the Secretariat in correspondence with the members of the Council and their Governments. All this intermediate business is

carried on in private, or rather, only with so much publicity as may be accorded by the Governments concerned in answer to Parliamentary Questions.

Moreover, when the Council does meet, its sessions are held behind closed doors until such time as all the reports have been agreed upon and have assumed their final shape. Then a public séance is arranged for, and the reports are read before an audience of pressmen, officials, and diplomats, and given to the newspapers. Such a course of procedure is not enlivening. There is no drama, no clash of wits or play of temperament, no contest, no atmosphere in these public sessions of the Council. More insipid copy for a journalist could not well be imagined than the tranquil and decorous spectacle of a number of elderly gentlemen standing at a table and reading out in turn lengthy reports which nobody rises to contravene. It is natural that the friends of the League should wish to bring the Council a little more prominently into the limelight. Would it not be possible, they urge, that some of the preliminary sittings, when there is real discussion, when there may be even a moving duel between the representatives of two pleading nations, should be open to all the world? We shall hear more of the subject, seeing that it has been referred by the Assembly to the Council for report.

Meanwhile, it is sufficient to make two observations. Tame as the procedure of the Council may appear to be, it does undoubtedly give to the world all that it is essential that the world should know, that is, the formed and unanimous conclusions which have been reached by the Council in the matters submitted to its scrutiny.

The objection to secret diplomacy is not lodged

against the secrecy of the preliminary procedure but against the concealment of the final result. If a treaty is published we can afford to dispense with a knowledge of the private conversations which led to its conclusion. The important thing is not that the conversations should be overheard but that the treaty should be in the newspapers. Now all the conclusions of the Council are in the newspapers, and the case for further publicity rests not upon the objection to secret diplomacy but upon the very reasonable desire to secure advertisement for the League. Here, however, we are confronted by a second consideration to which sufficient attention has not, perhaps, been given—the decision of the Council must be unanimous. Everybody must be convinced or else nothing is done. But it is easier for eight or nine elderly men to feel their way towards unanimity, if they are not compelled to conduct their converging manœuvres under the microscopes and telescopes of the Press, but are permitted to shuffle about a little in slippers so to speak, to hazard a few preliminary impressions which are not placed upon public record, and to take up positions from which they may retreat without loss of credit as the argument demands.

Meanwhile, no more important task devolves immediately upon the Council than the examination and approval of the mandates. The idea of the mandate was derived by General Smuts from his reminiscences of Roman law, and the word was applied by the framers of the Covenant to denote the manner in which a state, undertaking responsibility for a colony or territory ceded by one of the Powers vanquished in the war, and inhabited by peoples ‘not yet able’, in the words of the Covenant, ‘to stand by themselves under the

strenuous conditions of the modern world, should interpret its civilizing mission'. The mandatory state was to be as the *tutor* to the *client*, as the trustee to the *cestui que trust*, extracting no profit for itself, considering only the well-being and development of the peoples submitted to its charge, and in the spirit and tenor of its administration using none of the methods familiar to the annals of conquest and annexation. But while it was common to every mandate that the mandatory must consider its charge in the light of 'a sacred trust of civilization', all mandates were not alike. 'The character of the mandate must differ according to the stage of development of the people, the geographical situation of the territory, its economic conditions and other similar circumstances.' An ancient civilization like that of Syria or Mesopotamia clearly demanded a lighter hand than the barbarous tribes of German East Africa or Togoland. In the one case 'administrative advice and assistance' rendered to a native Government until such time as the state was able to stand alone is prescribed. In the second case the Mandatory must be responsible for the administration of the territory under conditions which guarantee 'freedom of conscience or religion, subject only to the maintenance of public order and morals, the prohibition of abuses such as the slave trade, the arms traffic, and the liquor traffic, and the prevention of the establishment of fortifications or naval and military bases, and of military training of the natives for other than police purposes and the defence of territory, and will also secure equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other members of the League.' And there was a third type of mandate.

Certain territories such as South-west Africa and certain of the South Pacific Islands could best be administered under the laws of the Mandatory as integral portions of its territory. Yet even in this third class of mandate, which approximates most closely to annexation, all the safeguards enumerated above for the protection of the indigenous population in Central Africa are to be observed. The governing idea of all these types of mandate is the moral responsibility of the Mandatory for the well-being and progress of the peoples committed to its charge.

No one will contest the grandeur of the conception which inspires this famous article in the Covenant. The government of these backward regions of the world is to be entrusted to nations acting in the spirit of disinterested trustees and rendering to the Council of the League an annual report of their stewardship. To the student of Anglo-Indian history there is nothing new in the conception of the disinterested government of subject races. What is new and what may indeed find many enemies in our common human nature is the establishment of an authority imposing upon us all a high standard of self-restraint and self-abnegation in the execution of such a trust. We all of us like to go our own way and resent foreign criticism of our shortcomings. More particularly do we resent the critic who has not shared our toil or tasted of our hardships. Siren voices will soon be heard whispering us away from the straight and narrow path of the Covenant. We shall hear the argument that the government of these territories is so great a burden, that the state which undertakes it may reasonably be allowed a certain latitude and a certain profit from the undertaking.

We shall be told that peoples and parliaments will not continue to vote money unless they can see some prospect of a return. There will be rumours of oil, of minerals, of potential divisions of troops, as serviceable as those brave Senegalese whose help was so convenient to France in the recent war. It will not be an altogether easy task to maintain in its original and severe purity the conception of the mandate against all the different forms of political and economic pressure to which it will be exposed. The task of the permanent Commissions which will receive and examine the annual reports of the Mandatories and advise the Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates will be delicate as well as responsible. To give the law and the tone, and that tone a high one, to the administration of these vast and scattered territories, will be its business. And what a business ! What an opportunity of comparing and testing the best ideas of the most forward nations on the subject of colonial administration in all its branches and of spreading them broadcast through the world ! What an organ for the dissemination of knowledge, for the interchange of wholesome suggestions, for the removal of wrongs and abuses, and for steady elevation of government and society above the level which it would keep if left to itself in these backward regions of the world. Even if the Permanent Commission should find nothing to reprehend in the manner in which the mandatory states discharge their duties, the mere fact that an organ is set up to assure the conscience of the civilized world that the purpose of the Covenant to consult in the best way for the best interest of the ceded population is in fact fulfilled must be a point of arresting importance and a weighty

earnest of a good standard of public conduct in the future.

We are then optimists in this matter of the mandates, believing that, even if human nature cedes here and there to temptation, the lot of many millions of men and women will be improved by the apparition of a new and authoritative body for the supervision of their interests. But our optimism is accompanied by a qualification. While there is no part of the work of the League which a well-directed public opinion will more jealously watch, there is none which, failing the support of such opinion, is so likely to disappoint the sanguine hopes of the friends of progress.

All this may be conceded, and yet the question may be asked whether not the mandates only, but the whole conception of the League may not be the product of that 'gigantean state of mind' which, as Bacon says, 'possesses the troublers of the world'. Is it possible that a scheme planned on a scale so spacious and grand, making such demands upon the enlightened and the rational parts of human nature as well as upon its energy, its will, its capacity for further sacrifice, and at the same time involving, as all peace projects coming after a period of heroism in war inevitably must, a heightening of those aspects of human virtue, which war tends to throw into the shadow, and a lowering of those aspects which war tends to make conspicuous, is it possible that such a scheme will command the effective and enduring obedience of mankind? An English critic, who is a pacifist and a liberal of the old style, might object to the League, not its pacifist and liberal tendencies, but the fact that membership of the League, if the constitution is to be taken seriously,

may commit his country to vast enterprises and unmeasured liabilities. Such a critic might well exclaim 'It is possible that the Peace treaties may have left us the best of all possible worlds. I do not argue the point. I am merely concerned to note that the edifice created by these treaties will be terribly expensive to keep in repair and that I am bankrupt, that Mesopotamia, Palestine, and German East Africa are doubtless fine provinces, but that I did not support the war with Germany in order to increase the responsibilities and charges of the British Empire, nor as a Zionist, nor with quixotic designs upon the souls of the Arab or Negro. These projects are the luxuries of the rich and the vigorous. I am poor and tired. Moreover it is my conviction that the expenditure of British life and energy upon cosmopolitan aims has gone far enough. My constituents too are of the same opinion, and having already some difficulty in finding pocket money for their humble pleasures are not inclined to tax themselves to keep the Russians out of Warsaw, or to maintain a disinterested government at Bagdad.'

The real answer to this line of argument is that the policy of splendid isolation is difficult for any power and impossible for an Empire whose territories are scattered over every quarter of the globe. However insular we may feel, however insular we may desire to be, we are fatally involved in the economic and political complex of the world and cannot either honourably or safely extricate ourselves from its machinery. We may not be able to save the independence of Poland, but do not let us imagine that the fall of Warsaw would make no ultimate difference to the electors of Glasgow or Nottingham. We may not be able to deliver Austria

from financial ruin, but because we cannot afford to give the necessary assistance, do not let it be imagined that we shall not be sufferers through her collapse. We may not be able to enforce the minority clauses of the Treaty of Peace, but let it not be supposed that the Rumans can oppress the Magyars in Transylvania or the Poles rough ride the Germans in Posen without fanning into flame a war of revenge which will affect the domestic budget of every housekeeper in this kingdom. We or those who come after us may find it expedient to renounce this mandate as too burdensome and that mandate as too perilous, but the act of renunciation, so far from being indifferent, will set in motion political currents which in innumerable ways, impossible now to descry or determine, will affect our domestic history and our position in the world. We are not therefore alone in the world. We cannot act as if we were alone. Whether we acknowledge it or no we are part of a society of nations, sharers in a commonwealth whose interests are interdependent and served by the continuance of peace. The Covenant of the League, then, does not imply a new order but rather an old truth, neglected in the frenzied hour of international passion, but never neglected with impunity, and exacting of those who defy her a long and terrible vengeance. How terrible that vengeance can be we have now experienced; how long that vengeance may last we have still to discover.

Is it then Utopian and extravagant to take some security in the future against a repetition of the calamity of which we have memories so fresh and afflicting? Is it not a counsel of ordinary prudence so to act? May we not, the state of Eastern Europe being such

as we now find it, be faced with a century of butchery, if no force be created sufficient to command the respect and to curb the ambitions of the small nations so recently enfranchised and so new to the sobering responsibilities of freedom? If the security of the League be insufficient, let it be strengthened. If the Covenant of the League be faulty, let it be improved. If there be a better substitute for the League let it be supplied. But do not let us fold our hands in supine and hopeless resignation, as if the recurrence of cruel and devastating wars were part of the unalterable law of nature. So long as men admire war, they will seek it, and so long as they intend war they will have it, but the human mind is subject to influence; and among the forces capable of acting upon it is the existence of an institution supported by the Governments and peoples of the world and having for its object the maintenance of peace and good will between nations.

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